1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

akin in function even in the superficial view of the Caucasian, and are much more closely related in primitive thought—indeed the fire-drill is but a featherless and nockless arrow, with the foreshaft charred at its fire-giving tip; and all are closely linked in language and allied with other terms in such wise as practically to establish identity among them in the thinking of their lowly makers (though unfortunately the incomplete vocabularies extant are insufficient for full study of the linguistic homologies). Briefly the indications are that the harpoon was the primary device, and that its foreshaft was a tooth of an aquatic fish-eater like the seal, or perchance in some cases an os penis; that its lineal successor was a loose-head lance for use on sea and land, at first with the unaided hand and later with the atlatl, or throwing-stick (the lance being now extinct, though recorded by early visitors to Seriland); that the next artifact-generation in the direct line was represented by the arrow, foreshafted with hard wood or tooth, made light and graceful and loose-headed or not, according to needs, and by the substitution of bow for atlatl; and that a somewhat aberrant line was marked by the taming of fire, its reproduction by the modified arrow, and the differentiation of fire-stick from arrow and either atlatl or bow.

In tracing these stages in technologic growth, it is to be remembered that the Seri are so primitive as to betray some of the very beginnings of activital concepts; that to them zoic potencies are the paramount powers of the cosmos; that in their simple thought fire is a bestial rather than a physical phenomenon; that in their naive philosophy the production of devouring flame is of a kind with vital birth and a similitude of sexual reproduction; and that according to their notions the conquest of quarry, including fire, is made practicable only by aid of the mystical potencies of beasts and flames gained through invocatory use of symbols or actual organs.

In the Seri tongue the term "fire-drill" is *kaak*, an indefinite generic meaning "kind" or "strong kind", with an egocentric connotation ("Our-Strong-Kind"), as in the proper tribal designation *Kwa-kaak* or *Ka-kaak;* while the term for the nether fire-stick or hearth is either *maam* ("woman", or more properly "mother"), or else (and more commonly) *kaak-maam*, which may be rendered "Kind-Mother"—the "Kind", as among primitive folk generally, comprising both men and tutelary beasts, and in this case fire as the most mysterious of the beasts; there is thus a suggestive analogy between the designation for the fire-producing apparatus and that for the tribe itself. It should be noted that the zoic concept of fire is widespread among the more primitive peoples of various provinces, and sometimes persists in recognizable form in higher culture (witness the fire-breathing dragons of various mythologies, the "Red Flower" notion gathered in India by Kipling, etc); also that the ascription of sex to the fire-sticks is prevalent among North American tribes, and at once helps to interpret the development of the fire-drill, fire-syringe, and other primitive devices, such, for example, as

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

those so fully described by Hough,[1] and serves to explain the otherwise obscure genesis of the fire-sense, which must have accompanied and shaped that most significant of all steps in human progress, the conquest of fire.

The modern coordinate of the Seri arrow is the bow, made preferably from a straight and slender branch of the palo blanco. A typical specimen is illustrated in plate XXX; it is 4 feet 9½ inches long, with the outer face convex and the inner face flat; greatest width 1⅝ inches, narrowed to 1¼ inches at the hand-hold; thickness at the hand-hold 1 inch, thinning to five-eighths inch at 8 inches from this point; tapering gradually in both dimensions toward the extremities, which are rudely notched to receive the cord (of mesquite-root fiber). The specimen illustrated has been cracked and repaired in two places; in one place the repair was effected by a rough wrapping of sinew, and in the other by slipping over the wood a natural sheath of rawhide from the leg of a deer. The specimen is of added interest in that it combines bow and nether fire-stick ("Strong-Kind-Mother"), one of the friction holes being worn out to the notched margin, and the other remaining in usable condition, as shown in the enlarged marginal drawing.[2]

Compared with the delicately finished and graceful arrow, the typical bow is a rude and clumsy device; it displays little skill in the selection and shaping of material, and evidently involves little labor in manufacture—indeed, the indications are that more actual labor is spent in the construction of a single arrow than in the making of a bow, while the arrow-making is expert work, betokening craft of a high order, and the bow-making little more than simple handiwork of the lowest order. The comparison affords some indication of the genesis of Seri archery, and at the same time corroborates the independent suggestion that the arrow is of so much greater antiquity than the bow as to represent a distinct stage in cultural development—though the precise cultural significance of the bow is not easily ascertained.

Efforts were made to have different Seri warriors at Costa Rica in 1894 assume the normal archery attitude, with but moderate success, the best pose obtained (illustrated in plate XXVIII) being manifestly unnatural and a mere reflection of the attitude in the mind of the Caucasian poser; while the results of inquiries served only to indicate that the normal archery attitude was purposely avoided for reasons not ascertained. Fortunately another observer was more successful: in the course of the United States hydrographic surveys in 1873, Commander (now Admiral) Dewey received several visits from Seri warriors on board the *Narragansett*; and on the occasion of one of these visits, Mr Hector von Bayer, of the hydrographic party, caught a photograph of an archer in the act of drawing his bow. The negative was accident-

[1] Fire-making apparatus in the U. S. National Museum; Smithsonian Report for 1888, pt II, 1890, pp. 531-587, and elsewhere.

[2] Ordinarily the nether fire-stick is of soft and porous wood, between palm-wood and water-logged pine being preferred.

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930) 1931 NU31 Seri NU31

it was set up by an archer in front of himself, or carried for him by another man. At any rate it suggests open fighting besides raids and ambushes. 714

Pottery, which is thin, porous, and reddish-buff to gray, was not seen made. The clay is said to be tempered with jackrabbit or horse dung. The vessel is started, apparently by coiling, in a dish or receptacle. It is certainly built up by coiling, the sausages being somewhat less than the thickness of a finger. It dries fast, the bottom becoming somewhat hard as the top is being built. The coils are smoothed as they are added, with a stone inside, a shell to scrape the outside. A paddle is not used. The vessel is further smoothed with the stone and dried for a day. It is fired with wood, sufficient manure being unavailable on the island. 323 [372]

3:Davis & Dawson E-5 (1923-1940) 1945
MU31 Seri MU31

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Sea turtle was still the staple meat, and with better boats and improved tools and tackle borrowed from the Mexicans, the living was becoming considerably less harsh along the shores. They then had nine boats for some two hundred people. One good boat could secure a living for five families, and they had well improved this minimum standard of living.

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The origin of the use of fire among the Seri's is unknown, but they have their own story of it. One day Chico Romero, present chief of the Seris (Fig. 19), made a fire drill out of a piece of dry driftwood and showed how to make a fire by turning the stick between the hands. In three or four minutes the fine dust became a glowing punk which, with the aid of some dry grass and the wind, was quickly fanned into a flame. He was then induced to tell the legend. He looked about and pointed to a little green and blue-bodied fly and said: "The gods sent this fly down from the sky to show us how to make fire. Notice when it lands. Did you not see

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FIG. 18. THE NATIVE DANCE
IS DONE ON TOP OF A TURTLE SHELL TO THE BEAT OF A BOW STRING BEING STRUCK WHILE THE BOW IS HELD AGAINST TWO INVERTED BASKETS OF SAND.

[p. 265 (B)]

it take its two hands, rub them over its head and then rub them together a few times? The Indians noticed this and in this way we were taught by this little fly how to make fire by rubbing a stick back and forth between our two hands."

In response to comments about the nocturnal howling of the coyote, Chico told another interesting tribal legend. "A long time ago all Seris were birds or animals. The badger had charge of the saints or gods, which were little images carried in a pouch and hung around his neck by black strings.

FIG. 19. CHICO ROMERO
WHO SUCCEEDED OLD JUAN TOMAS AS CHIEF OF SERIS.

Coyote got to quarreling with badger and, watching his chance, grabbed the bag, tore it loose and ran off with it, giving his derisive laugh as he ran, and ever since coyote has been laughing at badger and all others.

[p.266(A)]

285 [824] I watched a woman make a basket. She used young branches from the terote tree, I think *terote blanco*. The bark was peeled and shredded into two parts, the heart taken out and kept separate. The coils of the round part were put in a pot of hot water to soften, and the edge of the basket was soaked a little in hot water. The center of the coils or woof consisted of six or eight strips of heart while the outer sap wood was woven around in regular coil-weave fashion.

[237] [412] A brad of deer shin-bone sharpened on pumice to a needle point was used as a brad. With this brad she split the fiber, held one piece in her mouth, and stripped the back down. Then she punched a hole in the bone brad, inserted the sharp end of the fiber and pulled it almost through. She then repeated the operation, adding a strip of heart once in a while. These baskets are coarse and unattractive, but they are hard and tough and stand heavy use.

323 Cooking vessels consist of two or three cooking ollas that nest together to facilitate transportation. These are made of coarse clay, solely for utility without regard for beauty of shape, color or design. In burning these ollas they use the shell of the sea turtle. [237] The cells of the shell are filled with a fine oil and this burns the ollas. On most of the other places on the mainland, the Indians use [372] cow chips, or dried droppings to fire the clay.

263 484 123 We proposed to shift camp to Tinajanita, our first landing place, where Herrera was to meet us in two days with the Chief and some of his men. Since it was blowing, he said the men couldn't fish and they would be on land probably hunting, so he would be able to see them. [277] At this time they gathered *sescal* on an island off the west coast to make the liquor they used at fiestas, weddings and other celebrations.

Herrera left at five o'clock in the morning, with a swinging gait, for the opposite side of the Island. The distance around by boat would be fifty miles, and across, only about twenty or twenty-five---a full day's trip and hard, as mountains would have to be crossed and the rocks were sharp and the way difficult.

123 We had breakfast on rice and bread. Our rations are running low and we expect to move this morning. We made arrangements about the native boat and saw Blanco trot off with two five-gallon cans for water, a distance of ten miles. We went to the camp to get a few things---an old basket, a Pelican hide and other things, and then we asked the help of everybody to get the boat down to water---the tide was very low. The one man, the women and five of us were required to drag and push the boat to water.

We waved goodbye, loaded her up and then rowed against the tide and wind for miles, and finally landed in a lovely sheltered lagoon, built our fire and had lunch. A few crabs were speared, and late in the afternoon the wind shifted. We loaded the boat again and pushed off for Tinajanita, our first landing place. After rowing, we raised

[text continues on p.174]

five-gallon cans full. They were fastened one each end of a *palanca*, or shoulder pole, and thus brought to camp. If anyone thinks this is easy they should try it over rocky, uneven, sandy, stony ground, dodging thorny vegetation at every step. 123

The colors of the mountains were mostly red of volcanic character, with great streaks of yellow and pink, deeply cut with side canyons and sharp ridges, all similar to other desert ranges. [133]

The men caught a few crabs and gathered clams in the afternoon, which helped out our larder. One of them told about his wife being shot. He said they had a big fiesta and during the drunk, a Seri shot at his head. He happened to be stooping alongside his wife and the bullet buried itself in his wife's thigh. We could feel it through her clothes.

A good many years ago when stages ran between Nogales and Guaymas, the Seris held up the stage, killed the men and captured one Mexican girl. She was brought here and made the wife of one of the chiefs, Coyote Iguana, and she bore children. Some years later her brothers came here to induce her to return, but she refused, saying that she was ashamed to go back and she had children here. About fifteen years ago in a battle with the Papagos, two of her sons were killed. 648 727 563

The Papagos have taken toll of many Seris, these hunted Indians who are such fascinating and ingenious companions, whether they are harpooning turtle or packing water through the thorny wastes. 648

372 516 291

Seris making fire (with fire drill) - Island of Tiburon

123 relief and contentment rose, and everybody smiled. This concoction I placed on the fire while the Indian stirred with a long stick. It took half an hour to cook into a thick sticky paste, gummy white.

[415] Meanwhile, the women vanished and returned with various vessels: greasy baskets, a black chamber pot, frying pans, ollas, stew pots, shells, any old thing---even a cuspidor. When ready, the Indians dipped the sticky mess out with a cup into the various vessels and the women and children licked it up. Some of the children covered the back of a large clam shell with the paste and then licked it off, repeating this until it was gone. Most of the people hooked their fingers into it and licked them off time and again. Any drip on the outside was carefully licked off that four gallons of goo. I do not think one single drop was lost.

126 123 As one little girl was carrying away a clam shell of paste I secured her photograph. It was a sight not soon to be forgotten, to watch these little ones dip in their fingers, mostly two, sometimes three fingers and contentedly lick them off.

Wishing to secure a photo of the Indians in Pelican skin kilts, Roberto induced Chico Romero to strip and wrap a kilt of Pelican skins around his waist. He did this and Roberto secured a good photograph. For this service, Chico demanded three oranges which he gave to his children.

By coaxing and wheedling and joking, Roberto finally persuaded a young woman to put on the Pelican kilt, and she gradually pulled off her shirt, or waist, or whatever name it goes by, and laughingly permitted it. As her brown shoulders and breasts were exposed she covered them with her arms and hands while I took the photo. I gave her some blue powder to decorate herself and a little round mirror.

372 Chico Romero made a fire drill out of a piece of dry driftwood from a cottonwood tree, and then made a fire by turning the stick between his hands. After three or four minutes the fine dust became punk and turned into a live coal. This he carefully put in some dry grass and by holding it up in the wind it was fanned into a flame. The price of this was a red bandanna.

372 773 825 The legend of Fire was told to me later by the campfire. The Seris' god sent down a fly to Seriland to show the Indians how to make fire. The fly was pointed out to me one day. It was a trifle larger than a house fly with a body of shining green and blue.

"Now," they said to me, "notice when it lands. Did you not see it take its two hands, rub them over its head and then rub them together a few times?". . ."Each time it settles it rubs its hands together, and our Indians noticed this and in this way we were taught by this little fly how to make fire by rubbing a stick between our two hands, back and forth. One fly came to earth and found something dead and he rubbed a stick between his hands and made a smoke signal

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826 so all the other flies could see and also come to this dead thing."

787 A few weeks ago, Antonio Herrera had a very vivid dream. He dreamed
[198] that he was hunting in the mountains for deer and came across a cave. (These volcanic mountains are pitted with caves.) He went into the cave and saw all kinds of things dear to the heart of a Seri---plenty of rifles, lots of cartridges, knives, *manta* (unbleached cotton), necklaces, red bandannas, blue overalls, *plata*, or silver, and many other things.

[198] When he awoke he sought his father Manuel Encinas, who is a medicine man and interpreter of dreams, to explain his dream to him. The price demanded by Manuel was six *tiras*---or 30-30 cartridges, a very high price, according to Seri standard. The explanation was this:

It was true that the cave was there and all the things in it just as seen and described by Antonio, but in order to find it he would have to fast nine days and go without water that length of time also, in the heat of summer. Then the way would appear to reach the cave. So far, Antonio has not attempted the fast.

281 I witnessed the operation of making a certain kind of pitch or
396 tar which the Seris use to make the seams in their canoes or boats tight. The women pound up the dried pulp next to the outside skin of a dead *pitahalla* cactus (organ cactus). This is very dry and brown in color and the pieces are pounded up to a dry powder with a wash or shore rock in a dried deer hide. This is placed in a *batella*, or flat basket, and manipulated so that the coarse pieces come to the top and are scraped off and thrown away. The fine powder is then put in a five gallon can and some porpoise or sea-lion oil or horse oil is poured on it and stirred into a thick gummy mass. When thoroughly mixed it is put over the fire, in an olla, to boil and continually stirred for an hour or two until it is the consistency and has the appearance of coal tar. While being worked it is kept heated and applied to seams inside and outside the boat. It hardens just like tar and answers the same purpose.

123 Since the corn, which had kept this band of Seris in food, disap-
225 peared two days before we came, and they had barely kept going on
[189] seeds and a few fish, and they all had decided to leave camp with us in the morning---the women walking and the men and some children in boats---it was necessary to supply them with some food to take them to the hunting grounds of the *cahuama*, or sea turtles, and land them
[242] on the Island. The *cahuama* would furnish them meat---their favorite and national food, and the shores would supply them with clams, oysters, crabs and other sea food.

123 So the whole band was called around our camp and each family was furnished with two cups of corn, two of beans, some green coffee and a cup of cube sugar. For the first time our camp was free of Indians, and we ate and went to bed in peace.

The amenities of civilization were laid aside and forgotten in